

*Incomplete*

# Catholics and Frank Statement

John Huss the "Martyr"  
Clement's "Absolution" of Cellini

## The Catholic Mind

SEMI-MONTHLY

Price 5 cents: \$1.00 per year

Entered as second-class matter, October 22, 1914, at the Post Office at  
New York, N.Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879.

*Vol. XIV, No. 1. January 8, 1916*

THE AMERICA PRESS

59 East 83d Street

NEW YORK

# THE CATHOLIC MIND

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## Catholics and Frank Statement

BY ERNEST R. HULL, S.J.

(Reprinted from the Bombay "Examiner")

IF we take Catholics as a mass of humanity, we naturally expect to find among them the defects which are incidental to all human nature. It is one of the tendencies of human nature to seize on things favorable to one position and make the most of them, and on the contrary to shirk those which are unfavorable or to make the least of them. This is especially the case in controversy, in which one of the practical principles is to claim as much as possible on one's own side, and concede as little as possible to the other side.

The writing of history, too, is likely to be dominated by the controversial idea of making out the best case for one's own position and the worst case for the adversary's position. Hence it is quite natural that among Catholics in general there will sometimes be found the nursing and cherishing of a version of history favorable to the Church, and the endeavor of minimizing the opposite version which is most unfavorable to the Church. Often enough this one-sidedness comes really from ignorance of history, or the influence of a loose and colored notion of it; in which case the truth of the other side is really unknown, or is not believed, but put down to prejudice, when it is presented by an enemy.

This partisan attitude is thus compatible with good

faith; but it cannot escape the stigma of unfitness to judge and speak on the matter. Thus the *Examiner* not seldom finds it necessary to make a protest against bogus lines of argument and spurious forms of apologetic which crop up from time to time in Catholic newspapers and popular books; and the concessions and the repudiations which we make in such cases are sometimes taken amiss by readers who are not well enough up in the subject to see the soundness of the line taken.

All this can fairly be conceded to the adversary. But what we contend for is that these faults, when found among Catholics, are accessory and accidental, and are not rooted in the Catholic ethos. When we say that Catholics welcome a frank statement of history, we mean, first of all, that there is nothing in the Catholic system which is calculated to induce a fear of history, or to need the faking or blinking of facts in order to bolster it up. The open facing of facts at their worst will indeed put an end to a certain facile way of writing history, in which the rosy side of things is painted up and the dark shadows softened or painted out. It will call upon a writer for explanations, justifications or condonations which the delusions of a false optimism render unnecessary. But what I say is this: If you take any well-trained Catholic student or scholar, who has a comprehensive knowledge of Catholic doctrine and of the history of Christendom—I am thinking of such men as Grisar, Pastor, Janssen, Mann, Gasquet, Thurston, and the like—his disposition will not be to cloak or shirk the disagreeables, but to concede them as frankly as they are stated by outsiders. He will rather tend to make them his own, and merely to put them in their right perspective so as to deprive them of that mischievous signifi-

cance which an enemy to the Church will needlessly attach to them.

It is true that an outsider, confident of the version of history with which he is imbued, will feel astonishment at the opposition which his historical statements meet with from Catholics. For instance, it must be a matter of great surprise for the authors of the "Groundwork" and "Brief Survey" to find how many points, which they have laid down with complete assurance, are subjected to criticism and even contradiction. At first sight this will certainly look like a rooted objection among Catholics "to accept a frank statement of history." But if those notes and comments are carefully studied, the matter will begin to appear in a different light. The objection made against the various passages is not on the ground that they are *frank*, but on the ground that they are *false*—sometimes altogether false to fact, but more often false in their interpretation. The questions of fact can easily be tested; the questions of interpretation not so easily. For interpretation generally needs a key; and if two different parties apply a different key, the further question arises, which is the right one? Here we contend that the competent Catholic has an advantage over the otherwise competent Protestant. This we hold for the reason already given—namely, that in things medieval the interpretation must come from the inside; and that Catholics, from the very fact of being Catholics, have a habit of viewing things medieval from the inside, while Protestants, from the very fact of being Protestants, have the habit of viewing things from the outside.

Of course, it might be pleaded that an outside view is likely to be more impartial than an inside view. This

may be generally true when we look at the objective essences of things, which are determined by cold analysis unaffected by personal prejudices or motives. But it is not so true in matters of history, in which the actions of persons have to be interpreted from their own standpoint and in relation to the prevailing conditions of their own times. When a clash of this kind occurs between two versions of history, the results depend not so much on argument, as on getting the other side to see that the Catholic interpretation is really the right one, just because it arises out of the times in which the event occurred, and is an interpretation of things medieval by medieval standards; while the Protestant interpretation arises out of a set of principles altogether antagonistic to the medieval ones, and involves the reading of one century through the spectacles of another—which is almost sure to be one-sided and wrong.

What is true in one way of the interpretation of medieval history is in another way true of the interpretation of the Reformation period. The Protestant views the whole matter from the standpoint of a *fact accomplished*, and is more interested in the (to him) desirable and excellent results, than in the extremely undesirable means by which that result was achieved. He does not exactly say that the end justifies the means; but with the end in possession, he feels little disposition to censure and criticize the means by which that end was accomplished. The Catholic, on the other hand, rather tends to look at the Reformation as a *process* by which the old and (to him) right order was overthrown and a new and (to him) wrong order set up in its place. Hence, his disposition to lay stress on the means by which it was accomplished. This involves a looking at

the Reformation from the standpoint of the Reformation period, and not from that of three centuries later.

No Protestant is expected to agree with the Catholic in his fundamental principles; for if he did, he could not remain a Protestant any more. But he is expected, in writing history, to put himself in the place of those whose lives and actions have made history—to view medieval things as the medieval age viewed them and the Reformation period as the Reformation period viewed them. In the latter case, as there were then two opposing parties watching each other, so in the writing of the history there must now be two parties watching each other. If the Protestant insists in portraying the Protestant mind in the Reformation struggle, the Catholic must insist on portraying the Catholic mind in the same struggle. To give prominence to the one and ignore the other means a one-sided presentment. Catholics do not object to a frank presentation of the Protestant side; but they do insist that the picture shall be completed by an equal presentation of the Catholic side—and that half the history should not be left out.

The manifest discrepancy between the Catholic and the Protestant versions of English ecclesiastical history naturally leads us to realize the fact that if Catholics have their historical ethos, Protestants have their historical ethos, too; and it will be useful to indicate more pointedly the difference between them.

Each ethos has its starting point in certain presuppositions of a more or less theological nature. The Catholic conception of the Church, as a Divine institution permeated with the supernatural, does not merely lead to a spirit of reverence in dealing with its history as an institution, and a family-feeling in dealing with its

leading personages. Beyond this it gives to the Catholic a complete confidence that in all fundamental points the Church must be in the right—first, in the doctrines of faith and morals which it officially maintains, and secondly, in the exercise of its rulership in matters of Church discipline and canon law. This does not prevent a Catholic from admitting defects in the lives of churchmen, or in their lines of policy when dealing with those who stand in any kind of opposition to them. But at least it causes him to give full justice to the principles which are at stake, on which the claims of the Church both in teaching and in administration rest. All this, however, affects only the interpretation of the facts of history. It does not interfere with the facts themselves, which must always be faced, and as far as possible justified or explained, but never shirked, distorted or denied.

The Protestant ethos of history differs from this in most important ways. It starts from a flat denial of the Catholic conception of the Church. I do not here refer to the high Anglican view, which in some respects covers the same ground as the Catholic one. I refer rather to the ordinary Protestant traditional way of looking at things, in which the Church is conceived as an essentially invisible entity made up of the elect, which in its outward organization is a purely human thing. Hence the history of Christendom is viewed as one continual departure from a pure original idea of the primitive Church by altogether erroneous development to the Roman conception—a “rake’s progress” into an abyss of error from which we were delivered only by the Protestant Reformation. Hence rebellion against the Church of Rome becomes the greatest virtue; emancipa-



tion from it a most beneficial achievement. The struggles of kings to suppress and belittle the Church, no matter how counter to the general conscience of the time, were glorious acts; while the championship of the Church against such encroachments, no matter how well intentioned, becomes a resistance to justice and right. Similarly any new teaching, which claimed to rest on the Bible and ran counter to the teaching authority of the Church, becomes an apostleship of truth against error; while every attempt to oppose the spread of such teaching or to suppress its propagators becomes unevangelical tyranny and persecution.

Well and good! Given the fundamental standpoint, one must admit that the whole position is logical. But then, as in the Catholic ethos, so in the Protestant ethos, *the facts must be faced*. Lies must not be told; exaggerations must not be indulged in; unfair interpretations must be tabooed. There must be no *suppressio veri* and *suggestio falsi* in the case—no half truths which are the worst of lies.

But this is exactly our standing complaint against the Protestant ethos. The wish being father to the thought, Protestantism has weaved together a version of history which, by constant repetition, and constant refusal to listen to correction, has become a tradition ingrained in the English mind. That version was originally compiled at the time of the Reformation itself, when all parties were in the heat of a deadly struggle; when each side thought the worst possible of the other side, and was ready to believe the worst that was told or suggested or insinuated or whispered against it. There is no doubt that an immense amount of falsehood was put into circulation about all persons and things Catholic during the

Reformation period, both in England and on the Continent; and this falsehood was at once a necessary means to alienating the popular mind from the Church, and at the same time a necessary means of giving plausibility to the teachings and justification to the actions of the Reformers, royal or other. Throw enough dirt, and some of it will stick! The amount thrown was so enormous, that a very large portion of it did stick; and what did not stick the first time, was thrown again and again, till finally it nearly all stuck. What was at first circulated by word of mouth and by the occasional pamphlet, soon got into book-form. This history of the Reformation and of the Church before the Reformation was soon written, and stereotyped as standard and classical, and thus became a national possession. There was an immense amount of bad faith in those who put it on permanent record, for they had not been brought up to it nor believed it implicitly; no bad faith at all in those who kept it up, following one another like sheep, and never dreaming that there was another and truer side to the story. Then Catholic historians arose in England who gave their lives to setting the mischief right—men like Lingard and Milner and Challoner and White and Dodd, and the rest. They were conscientious workers, who felt the injustice of the Protestant tradition and wished in fairness and truth to overthrow it by an appeal to authentic documents. They had no desire to exaggerate, still less to misrepresent. Their only aim was that of a prisoner accused of a crime, conscious of innocence and desirous to establish it by appeal to facts. They did the work well and offered it to the nation; but the nation would not listen or read, and clung to the traditional lie just as if it were Gospel truth. The very

fact that any one contradicted it was proof positive that he was wrong; and being a Catholic, of course, he had his motives! And so our historians lay moldering on the shelves—if they ever got on to the shelves at all—and England went on smugly hugging and cherishing its traditional version, its ancestral conspiracy of lies.

However, everything come to him that waits, if he will only wait long enough. The last generation or two has witnessed the birth of the critical method in history; the appeal to original documents, discriminately tested as to their reliability. The result is the gradual rise not only of Catholic historians, but also of non-Catholic historians who, impartially and on independent grounds, have found out the mendaciousness of the Protestant tradition and have borne witness that the Catholic version of history was the true one. Still it is extremely hard to overthrow a habit of mind, inborn or imbued from childhood. Hence the enlightenment of individuals is often only partial. They focus their attention on certain points, and get full light on these, and write that portion of history accordingly. But still there remains other points in which they have not specialized, and in which the traditional view still holds place in their minds without any suspicion that it also is wrong. Hence, we find men evidently impartial in disposition, doing justice to the Catholic side in certain matters; and yet the next moment flopping into some altogether exploded error without the least suspicion of what they are doing.

To any student interested in the question of the Protestant versus the Catholic version of English history we recommend therefore the following course: First, take up a few popular Catholic histories, short and comprehensive, in order to find out what the Catholic ver-

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sion of history is, and to compare it point by point with the Protestant one. Secondly, work over each point in the greater Catholic historians, and more standard works, to see the documentary basis of the Catholic contention. Thirdly, test the whole subject by appeal to the most recent non-Catholic writers, who in large numbers support the Catholic contention point by point. Then draw conclusions, and assimilate them, and aid in their circulation in the cause of truth. In order to aid this line of study we give below a short list of summary histories written by Catholics with which the student can begin:

(1.) "A Short History of the Catholic Church in England" (Preface by Bishop Brownlow). Catholic Truth Society, 1895. A careful work confined to ecclesiastical matters; as a summary it is a rather full one.

(2.) "A History of England for Family Use and the Upper Classes of Schools," by the author of "Christian Schools and Christian Scholars." Burns & Oates, 1891. Eighth edition. Not solely ecclesiastical; substantially good, though being first published in 1864, it does not embody the latest results. Highly readable and instructive.

(3.) "A Short History of the Catholic Church in England," by Abbot Gasquet. Catholic Truth Society, 1903. Strictly ecclesiastical; the work of a ripe scholar and one of the foremost rewriters of English History from the State papers and other documents; entirely reliable and up-to-date; very concise, pregnant and to the point; touches with a firm hand all the chief points of difference between the Catholic and Protestant version of history.

(4.) "The Church in English History; a Manual for Catholic Schools," by J. M. Stone. Sands & Co., 1907. Strictly ecclesiastical; highly readable and satisfactory.

(5.) "A History of England for Catholic Schools," by E. Wyatt Davies. Longmans, 1903. Also an abbreviated addition of the same, called "Outlines of British History for Catholic Schools." Longmans, 1906. Not only ecclesiastical

but general. Both works have been carefully examined by competent critics, and are fully satisfactory.

(6.) "Abridgment of the History of England, by John Lingard, with continuation from 1688 to the reign of Queen Victoria," by James Burke. Duffy & Sons. Original edition published in 1854. Twelfth edition, 1867. Duffy & Sons. A general history based on Lingard's classical work, reliable on the whole but not embodying recent results, except perhaps in the edition reedited by Birt, 1903.

(7.) Cobbett's "History of the Reformation." Use Gasquet's Catholic Truth Society edition. This work, which was greeted by the Protestant public as "one tissue of lies" just because it flatly contradicted the Protestant tradition in every particular, is in reality a very accurate work, based for the most part on Lingard. When Dom Gasquet edited the edition for the C. T. S. he found it desirable to cut out a good deal of Cobbett's raciness of style, his nicknames and more dynamic expressions; but as regards the facts of history he found, after critical examination, that there was very little to correct, and that little generally of a minute nature.

The reading of such a handful of compendious histories having laid the foundation in its broad outlines, deeper special reading can be begun. The complete standard Catholic history of England is Lingard's, which originally stopped at 1688, but has just been brought down to our times by Hilaire Belloc; and we presume the edition has been annotated in order to bring the whole up-to-date. Special monographs abound on special points. But we should recommend to the inexperienced student the special articles in the "Catholic Encyclopedia." The courses of reading given in the Index Volume, page 877 seq., will afford ready guidance, and if this does not suffice to meet all purposes, the list of books given at the end of each article can be consulted.

## JOHN HUSS THE "MARTYR"

BY JOHN F. X. MURPHY, S.J.

MEDIEVAL wanderers from the truth have always possessed a rare fascination for the Protestant mind, anxious to find early and ample instances of defection from spiritual authority. And in John Huss may be found not only a splendid instance of revolt against the constituted authority of his time, but what is more remarkable, one who in private life was otherwise above reproach. As July 6, 1915, marked the five-hundredth anniversary of his execution at Constance, a fit occasion was offered for the publication of "John Huss, His Life, Teachings and Death, after Five Hundred Years" (Scribner) by David S. Schaff, D.D., Professor of Church History, the Western Theological Seminary, and for the appearance in English of "The Church," (Scribner) the heresiarch's most characteristic work, which Dr. Schaff has translated from the Latin and provided with notes and an introduction.

Born at Husinecz, in Bohemia, about 1370, Huss attended the University of Prague, then in the heyday of its fame. He manifested no extraordinary talent as a student, coming into prominence after his ordination to the priesthood only by his moral sermons at the chapel of Bethlehem, and especially by his advocacy of the national claims against the German hegemony. Indeed his popularity then as now in his native land is principally to be ascribed to his outspoken leadership of the anti-German national movement, a movement that, when

it did get the upper hand, practically ruined, according to Dr. Schaff, the prestige of Prague University, and the intellectual leadership of the Czech people.

The sad effects of the Western schism with its loosening of ecclesiastical discipline, were apparent in Bohemia as in other lands, and Huss's sermons against the laxity of the clergy won him popularity with a certain class as did his anti-Germanism with others. It was not until he began to mingle with his preaching the errors of Wyclif, then proscribed by the English Bishops and the Roman See, that he fell into difficulty. Of great and learned reformers of the evils that Sacred Scripture tells us there will be in the Church until the end, the age of Huss had a brilliant share. St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Bernardine of Siena, St. John Capistran, St. John Cantius, St. James of the Marches, Gerhard der Groote, Thomas à Kempis, Johann Busch are only a few of the many brilliant contemporaries or sub-contemporaries of Huss, who succeeded in moving vast numbers of clergy and laity to a higher life without endeavoring to set aside the Church of the Ages and her Divinely revealed and safeguarded doctrines. But Huss was of that stamp of short-sighted, hot-headed reformers, of which our own time is only too prolific, who lay the axe to the root as a substitute for pruning. Of preachers against evil-doing and abuses there has never been a lack in the Church; but here as everywhere else zeal must be tempered by the no less Divine virtue of prudence. But in this, Huss, like so many would-be reformers in all times, was singularly wanting. To his denunciation of prevailing abuses, he added a personal rancor against the German element in Bohemia and a blind attachment to the errors of Wyclif then furtively making their way

among the Czechs. Without deep learning, as a perusal of his works reveals, for even the treatise on the Church, styled by Dr. Schaff his most representative production, shows little of that depth and lucidity of judgment that even their enemies concede to the schoolmen of the Middle Ages, Huss possessed unlimited confidence in his own ability to set right all the troubles of his day, and to teach popes, bishops and even the whole Church of God. So it was little wonder that in addition to personal and racial foes whom his fanaticism had aroused, his advocacy of the proscribed errors of Wyclif added the authorities of the Church to his opponents. Local superiors having failed to check his revolutionary propaganda, appeals were made to the Popes, and here again Huss's obstinacy brought him into conflict with the world-wide Church. To moderns who glory in the self-sufficiency of the individual to guide himself in the most serious of all the problems that beset man, those of his soul, Huss's challenge to the whole spiritual, political and learned world of his time, no doubt seems heroic; but to those who relying upon Scripture recognize a visible teaching authority Divinely set up on earth and who have learned from past and present history the sad fate of "private judgment," Huss will appear only as the mad enthusiast, ready to break down the work of ages, ready to hold the whole world wrong rather than admit error in his own judgment. Good he undoubtedly was in many ways, but personal probity is by no means an infallible index of correctness of teaching, much less an excuse for rebellion against properly constituted authority. The practice of the domestic virtues may have been characteristic of Aaron Burr, or Benedict Arnold, but it has never been held sufficient to ex-



plain away their treason to their native land. Core, Dathan and Abiron without doubt possessed many amiable and even upright traits, but notwithstanding the earth opened and swallowed them for their resistance to Moses.

The turmoil and wild rioting that followed Huss's manifold fanatical and fantastic preaching brought him into open conflict with the highest authority, and resulted finally in his summons to appear before the Council then sitting in Constance. To this he was accorded a safe conduct by the Emperor Sigismund guaranteeing him personal safety, but assuredly not excluding him from the legitimate jurisdiction of the Council, which in matters of faith was above the Emperor himself. At the Council, he was, on Dr. Schaff's showing, kindly treated by the Pope and the ecclesiastical jailers, but his strange and naive request to be allowed to debate the long-since condemned doctrine of Wyclif with the Fathers themselves was not unnaturally denied. It was as if a man on trial for burglary or assassination were to attempt to change the issue from the *fact* of the burglary or murder to the criminality or liceity of robbery or murder as such! Abundant passages from his chief work, "De Ecclesia," were cited to show the revolutionary and heretical nature of his teaching and as he refused to retract, the grim penalty that a more austere generation demanded was meted out. Huss perished in the flames on July 6, 1415.

Of the man himself and his work, even on the showing of his latest biographer, the most that can be said is that he was a misguided enthusiast, mistaking the violence and limitations of his nature for the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, willing to plunge his own country into

the throes of civil strife, and to uproot the dearest convictions of Europe for centuries, in order to propagate his own ill-founded theories. In depth and variety of learning he was no match for the truly sublime geniuses of the Middle Ages; for zeal and earnestness in combating evil even in high places he was inferior to hosts of single-minded friars; and while possessing many of the homely virtues that make the good man, he lacked those that in all ages have characterized the saint. That he "was burned at Constance, for his devotion to that sacred book" [the Bible] is egregiously false. Greater devotion than his to the Sacred Scriptures was a common virtue in the Middle Ages. Those Protestant writers who have honestly tried to enter into the mind of the medievalists by careful and exhaustive study of their literary and historical remains, recognize that never in the world's history was there such whole-souled reverence and devotion amounting to a passion manifested towards the Word of God. Maitland, Cutts, and many others may be cited as witnesses to the extraordinary familiarity of the Middle Ages with the Sacred Scriptures. But it was the Scriptures as interpreted by the Divinely constituted guardian of the Sacred Text. He suffered for his persistence in attempting to foist upon the world his own private interpretation of Scripture, an interpretation from which modern Protestantism, as well as that of the sixteenth century, frequently recoils. But that is devotion to one's own opinion, not necessarily devotion to Scripture itself. Moreover, with all his love for and dependence on Holy Scripture, Huss generally indulged in far-fetched interpretations while discreetly avoiding obvious but inconvenient texts. If anything more were required to show where the true devotion to Scripture

lay, it might be found in the fact, that Huss's opponents have handed down the Bible whole and entire to their descendants, while Huss's private interpretation has made of the sacred volume today a thing of shreds and patches.

Of his actual influence either upon his own time or upon posterity, little can be said, in spite of the efforts laboriously made by Dr. Schaff and other panegyrists to make of Huss one of the world's great movers. A half-century after his death sufficed to obliterate practically all traces of his sect, although in the meantime his followers had plunged Bohemia and Moravia into all manner of bloodshed, misery and confusion. And though Luther and other sixteenth-century reformers translated some of Huss's writings, still they borrowed little from him. Their own errors had been hatched before they made practical acquaintance with the Bohemian heresiarch. Indeed it was only when taunted by Eck with being a Hussite that Luther realized he had been treading unknowingly in the same path. Moreover in many important doctrines there was little in common between Huss and the Protestant reformers. It is rather his general spirit of revolt against religious authority, his substitution of the vagaries of private interpretation for the Divine tradition of the Church, his sense of his own sufficiency to instruct all other men and even the Church of God, that make him akin to Protestants, and of these qualities he was not the earliest exponent, for the first century had its Hussites.

The secular papers and the Protestant pulpit have expressed keen satisfaction that in our enlightened age and country such a "crime" as the burning of John Huss is practically "unthinkable." But fifteenth-century

Europe would find this modern attitude of mind quite as "unthinkable." Though we may now, to a certain extent, regret the severity which the churchmen of wisdom and probity who sat in the Council of Constance showed to an obstinate and formal heretic, we must not forget that this rigor was defensive and precautionary. For the innovators themselves, one and all, had no intention of dwelling peacefully with their orthodox neighbors, but to a man believed in the necessity of imposing by force and violence their own newly-hatched aberrations, which they themselves could scarcely agree upon for an hour, upon the vast majority of orthodox believers! Huss himself never hesitated to call in the "secular arm" to punish and amend what he deemed abuses in the Church. Thus specifically he called upon the kings of Bohemia and Poland to punish rigorously simony and other abuses that were troubling the Church's well-being. Surely it can not be a greater offense to call on the secular arm to punish those who are threatening her very existence. But with Huss, as with Dr. Schaff and other writers like him, it is all a question of whose ox is gored.

Much of our modern boast of toleration is pure humbug. We have changed only the object, not the passion. The modern man is tolerant in religious matters, simply because religion means little or nothing to him. He has come to neglect and even despise positiveness in religious dogma, deeming religious truth a matter of pure speculation, and consequently shrinks from any positive, much less extreme measures to protect it. But on matters that do count with him, the modern man can be quite as intolerant and aggressive as any of his medieval forbears. Here in our own liberty-loving America, when the emotions of the people are deeply roused, he would be a rash

man who would dare to contravene public opinion or prejudice. And even today in the United States are to be found vast numbers who would gladly deprive of many civil and political rights millions of their fellow-citizens for differing from them in matters of religious belief or at least because of the supposed political and social consequences of such belief.

It is largely a matter of the relative values that different ages put upon different objects. In a more rugged age when so many crimes were followed by the penalty of death, it was not strange that heresy should receive the same fate; in our own day voices are crying out against capital punishment even for deliberate murder, and the International Socialist finds death for treason the limit of extravagance. To the old medievalist, religion and religious unity were of paramount importance. His sturdy faith had never been weakened by the spectacle of 150 jarring sects all making most pathetic appeals to a dumb book, until religious divergencies become a mockery. He saw about him one grand majestic all-embracing institution, the visible Kingdom of Christ upon earth, from which had come not only the spiritual but even most of the temporal blessings of the land. He took seriously Christ's words regarding the unity of His holy Church, and it is not for us to blame him, if he considered no price too big to pay in order to preserve the matchless unity of God's visible Kingdom on earth. We Americans may have lost all sense of the value of religious unity, but we gladly, nay enthusiastically, paid but a half-century ago, a terrible price in human life, blood and suffering, not to speak of the vast wealth destroyed and the States made desolate, merely to maintain national unity. We did it gladly, and ever since have hailed the

heroes in blue who fought to maintain the Union as the darlings of our land. But then national unity means something to us, but as for religious unity, the average American non-Catholic considers it as unimportant as it is impracticable. Therein he differs as widely as possible from all men of Huss's day, and from all Catholics of our own.

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## CLEMENT'S "ABSOLUTION" OF CELLINI

**M**R. CHARLES DARLING, a Justice of the King's Bench in England, while summing up a libel case forsook for the nonce the gloomy precincts of the law and took a little jaunt into the flowery meads of church history. Referring to that famous artist and infamous rascal, Benvenuto Cellini, the Justice remarked that when Cellini "was making a brooch for the Pope, he asked the Pope to give him absolution for a murder he had committed, and absolution for crimes which he might commit in the future, which the Pope granted."

The accuracy of the learned judge's assertion, however, was called into question by Mr. W. S. Lilly, who took down Cellini's autobiography and found the passage Mr. Justice Darling had in mind. It was Benvenuto's account of how he had fired from the Castle of St. Angelo a wonderful shot which killed an officer in the Constable of Bourbon's besieging army. Pope Clement VII was amazed at Cellini's marksmanship and bade him explain how he made such a shot. This Cellini did with his usual modesty, and then, strangely enough, for his conscience was not the tender kind, he tells us how, "Upon my bended knees, I begged him to give me the blessing of his pardon for the homicide (*omicidio*) and for the others which I had committed in the castle in the service of the Church. Whereupon the Pope, lifting his hand and making a large open Sign of the Cross on my face, told me that he blessed me and that he pardoned me all the homicides that I had ever committed, and all that I should ever commit in the service of the Apostolic

Church." "This is a very different story," well observes Mr. Lilly, "from that which Mr. Justice Darling told the jury." As the "homicides" which the Pope "pardoned" Cellini had committed in a just war and "in the service of the Church," of course they were not "crimes" or murders at all, but justifiable acts of defense for which no sacramental absolution was asked for or required. Mr. Justice Darling subsequently admitted that, misled by John Addington Symond's inexact translation of Cellini's words, "he may have erred," but seems to think that the Pope, nevertheless, gave "an ampler absolution than was asked," as "these killings might include mere murder."

Now, what was the real nature of the pardon Clement VII granted Cellini? Could the Pope give him, in the words of the Justice, "absolution for the crimes he might commit in the future"? A writer in the *Tablet* holds that what Cellini asked for and obtained from the Holy Father was nothing more or less than a release from the ecclesiastical censures or disabilities he may have incurred by shedding blood. "The word Cellini uses in his request is *ribenedise*, which means to bless again, and which is the term technically employed in taking off a curse, . . . and the same word was used for any release from censures." But Cellini was not a cleric, so why should he feel such concern at having incurred an "irregularity"? Because homicide made even a layman "irregular" and "placed him in some sense under a ban, and would have been a ban to his reception of any of the minor orders, if he had wanted to enter the ministry of the Church." Moreover, "the idea of irregularity following on homicide, was widely diffused in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries."



So Clement's "absolution" of Cellini from future homicides committed "in defense of the Apostolic Church," meant merely that the Pope freed Cellini from any irregularity he might incur in future owing to the commission of any deeds of violence as justifiable as were the homicides he perpetrated during the siege of Rome. Besides, it should be remembered, that for this whole story of the "absolution" we have no authority but that of Cellini himself, who is widely renowned for his skill, among other gifts, in drawing the long bow. However, Mr. Justice Darling's "extra-judicial utterance" has given us an opportunity to nail once more the ancient calumny that the Church sometimes grants absolution for future crimes.